

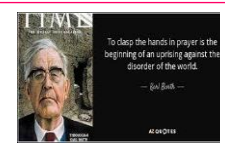
Paper 3: June 17th 2019 Afternoon: Pluralism, Theology, Society and Theology Of Religions

Theology of religion is the branch of theology that examines the status of different religions in relation to each other. *What is Truth? What is necessary / sufficient for salvation? Is it about intentions, beliefs or actions?*

Christian theological exclusivism (particularism): Only Christianity holds the truth and can offer salvation (Solus Christus). Truth claims are particular to Christianity. Explicit faith needed. The claim that God became human too different not to be taken seriously. Definite answers required for salvation. The Bible teaches that fallen humanity (no one deserves to be saved) is restored through the unique sacrifice of Jesus who taught ***"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to Father except through me."*** (John 14.6). In Acts 4, the Bible states: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven". St. Paul said: "There is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, Christ" (1 Timothy 2). **Restrictive Access or Narrow Exclusivism** believes salvation comes from hearing / accepting the Christian message (the Gospel) and God's grace, being baptised and confessing. **Some believe their denomination only (not liberal Christians) will be saved. Augustine and Calvin** believed God saves who God chooses (elects) in predestination. **The Catholic Church teaches there is no salvation outside of the Church;** though denominations and religions hold aspects of the truth, Catholicism is the full truth. In *Dominus Iesus* (2000), the Catholic Church stated it "has high regard" for "what is true and holy" in religions that reflect "a ray of that Truth which enlightens everyone." But they are "gravely deficient." **Universal Access or Broad Exclusivists believe Jesus' salvation (Christ gave himself as a ransom for all said St. Paul in 1 Timothy 2) restores the whole of humanity, past, present and future; God wishes everyone to be saved.** Origen and Gregory said **everyone will be reconciled with God.** If people's non – religious lifestyles are appropriately moral and spiritual, they will have the Christian message explained to them at the moment of death.

Karl Barth was a Liberal Christian but felt Christianity compromised when 93 intellectuals supported WW1. **Barth returned Christianity to God's revelation. He proposed "religion was unbelief." Religion was our arrogant attempt to reach God when the Fall has blocked this and God has reached down.** In a 1934 debate with Brunner, Barth denounced knowledge of God through natural theology. **Through God alone is God known. The Word of God was revealed in Jesus, written in the Bible (a witness to the Word in Jesus) and preached by the Church. Later, Barth allowed for the Holy Spirit opening up minds. God could speak through a flute concerto, Russian communism, a shrub or dead dog.** Religions "parables of the Kingdom" (Barth).

Evaluation 1. Exclusivism leads to wars and conflicts and treating others as less valuable people. 2. God is not loving if condemns people who could not have heard the Christian message. 3. If God cannot be fully understood, it is impossible to say that anyone can have full control of salvation. 4. The Parable of the Sheep and Goats says people judged on actions not beliefs. 5. Not fair for the Catholic Church to say other religions are a preparation for the Gospel but only Catholics can be saved. 6. Exclusivism does make sense if Christianity is right/Jesus is Son of God. 7. Universal Access Exclusivism respects faiths. 8. Imperialistic. 9. Free Will?



Theological Inclusivism. Although Christianity is the one true faith and normative way (usual or ideal way) to salvation, *it is possible for non-Christians who are anonymous (someone open to God's grace but not necessarily Christian) or invisible Christians to be saved.* Some say there may an opportunity to turn to Christ after death. All people have a spiritual aspect in themselves which makes them search for truth. If done in an appropriate way, even in another faith setting, non-Christians access the same benefits of Jesus' death on the cross. **There is religious experience outside Christianity. God's love includes all as shown by the parables of Sheep and Goats (Matthew 25) and Good Samaritan (Luke 17).**

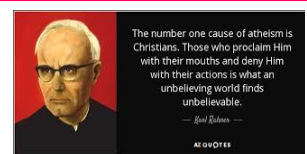
Restrictive Inclusivism: God makes special provision for those who have not heard the Gospel but respond through natural law or conscience. Christ's love for all.

Karl Rahner (German Catholic) wrote "Theological Investigations" and was influential at the Second Vatican Council (1962-5). He was an "Open Catholic" to "the pluralism of powers" in the world. He believed we are created with a natural orientation to God (transcendental anthropology) and morality. *We desire and encounter God's grace.* Rahner proposes 4 theses.

- 1. Christianity is "the absolute religion" (sola Christus) because of Jesus. No religion is equal to Christianity** which is the explicit expression of selfless love and grace presented in Jesus.
- 2. Other faiths though wrong are "lawful" if they have organisational structures, values and practices which encourage charity, love and selflessness. God loves all unconditionally and is found in nature, morality, conscience, culture and religion. The Incarnation is a development not a division of history** as grace as accessible before Christ (eg Old Testament). Wanting grace is sufficient. Other religions help people to salvation until they encounter the Christian message. Christians must not assume the non-Christians they encounter have no experience of truth
- 3. The Anonymous Christian: This is anyone of good will who desires God's grace like a Buddhist monk.** People who identify as members of a religious institution can be said to be good and moral and therefore on their own search for the truth. *Rahner draws on Acts 7 where Paul makes a speech in Athens to pagan people, commending listeners for an altar marked "to an unknown God." They had been worshipping the Christian God without knowing it.* People from other backgrounds worship God in their own way until they encounter the Christian message.
- 4. The Anonymous / Invisible Church meditates salvation for Anonymous Christians who anonymously participate in the mystical and spiritual "body" of the Church.** The Church is tolerant, humble, loving and fair to other faiths. It brings Christianity to the wider world.

Evaluation:

- 1.** Balances the unique Christ-event and the idea that a loving God.
- 2.** Acknowledges the idea of God within us.
- 3.** Confirms to Biblical ideas about the Jews being chosen by God.
- 4.** The Parable of the Sheep and Goats say judgement is based on actions.
- 5.** But accused of being patronising to other religions – what about anonymous Hindus?
- 6.** Decentralises Christ from salvation and undermines the role of the Church. What is the point of Jesus' death? Confession of sins key.
- 7.** It is a dressed-up version of universal access exclusivism. Non-Christian religions are still inferior. Exclusivism by a different name.
- 8.** Imperialist.
- 9.** How can people be part of something without knowing?
- 10.** What is the point of conversion?
- 11.** A meaningful relationship with God comes through choice.
- 12.** Christianity the absolute religion?



Theological Pluralism: The most common image to explain pluralism is the blind men and the elephant. *If a group of blind men touch each a different part of the elephant then each will gain a different understanding of the elephant. Each is equally valid but limited.* Theological Pluralism is the idea that there are many ways to salvation / liberation and Christianity is one of these paths. *Each religion is partially true and participates in a larger truth. No one religion is superior.* Religions different paths to same one goal and differences are only superficial. God present in different ways in different cultures. Truth not exclusive.

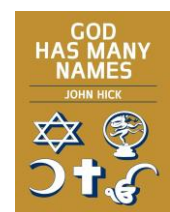
John Hick is the best-known advocate of pluralism. Growing up a traditional Christian, he was inspired by his work in multi-cultural Birmingham *where he thought a loving God would not condemn those of other faiths.* Hick proposed a philosophical and theological framework for greater understanding, a **global theology**. A natural theologian, *he believed religious experience was common to all religions, causes beliefs and is interpreted through faith traditions as different people interpret and experience the same reality in different ways. Cultural differences provide different lenses where we experience the Divine.* We “experience as” according to Hick who uses Wittgenstein’s duck rabbit example. We see only part of the picture according to culture and are finite, cannot know God.

Hick was influenced by Kant. Kant distinguished between noumena or noumenal (what a thing actually is) and phenomena or the phenomenal (how we individually experience it). The noumena of the divine (the Real or Eternal One) is one thing but is interpreted through different religions or phenomena. **Pluralism understands each of these phenomenally different expressions or religions as equally valid, referencing the same noumenal reality which Hick calls the Eternal One or the Real.** Some describe God, others Brahman, others Tao. Every religion ultimately falls short of the noumenal. **Authentic religions show “good fruits” by following the categorical imperative, love of neighbour, moving from self-centred ego to unselfish compassion and joy. There are moral saints in all religions.**

Hick advocated a Copernican Revolution in theology whereby Christianity would become focussed on God (theocentric) rather than Christ (Christocentric). For Hick, Jesus was God-conscious, an expression of God’s Love and his teaching was a gift to the world, but Jesus was not Son of God. **The Incarnation and Resurrection are symbolic myths with truth elements but they were not facts.** Christianity, like other religions, looks inwards on the side to God as other religions produce good people. JH believed in universal salvation.

Evaluation: 1. Undermines Christianity. Christ unique. 2. Hick does not include all – exclusivist? 3. How does Hick know. 4. Assumes Kant correct. 5. Religions think they are right. 6. Buddhists do not believe in God. 7. Imperialist – imposes categories on religion. 8. Atheists say Hick assumes God. Reject religion?

Hick is a unitary theological pluralist. Pluriform Theological Pluralism (Keith Ward): Many “Reals”. Each has its own valid version of salvation and liberation. **Ethical Theological Pluralism** (Paul Knitter): Liberation from suffering/injustice/concern for others (eg liberation theology) unites religions.



“What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6.8)

Inter-faith or religious or belief dialogue. Because of developments in technology, communication, migration (for safety as in the case of refugees or economic development) and globalisation generally, we are even more aware of, and encounter, different faiths and different denominations (within one faith). **We are a multi-cultural and multi-faith society.** *There is more mixing of communities as people do not just live in their local area. This has generally lead to more tolerance.* Like charity, it promotes social cohesion with society working together. **The Holocaust lead Christianity, and all people, to think about the relationship with Judaism and anti-Semitism in society.** *Inter-faith dialogue is the conversation between different faiths whether with individuals or communities.* Some see it about exploring differences others about social cohesion. **Exclusivists** point to common ground leading to Christian conversion. They believe evangelism (spreading the Christian message) is central following Jesus' command to "make disciples of all nations.". **Inclusivists** create sensitive dialogue with Anonymous Christians to communicate Christianity, but create dialogue, understand, work together with mutual respect. **Pluralists** seek different understandings of the truth, do not aim to convert but develop shared ways to stop conflict and ignorance and create peace and enhance understandings of the real. **However, modern secular society has less space for religion. There is suspicion of some faith communities**

In 2010, the Church of England produced a report entitled "Sharing The Gospel Of Salvation". It stated Christians must proclaim salvation through Christ in a multi-faith society whilst being sensitive, welcoming, develop good relationships, going beyond tolerance, leading a good, authentic and distinct Christian lifestyle, working for the good of society, a missionary by being proud of their tradition, talking with other faiths, working for the common good, praying worshipping together. Not about "selling" Christianity.

In 1990, Pope John Paul II released Papal Letter Redemptoris Missio (Mission of the Redeemer) including "Dialogue with our brothers and sisters of other religions." Catholics must respect others, inter-faith dialogue is not bad but an opportunity to share the truth of the Gospel (Jesus is the one saviour), find shared truth and build a happy society in a respectful way without conversion. All religions hold aspects of the truth (God shares revelation) led by Spirit. This mission is not for just priests

The Scriptural Reasoning Movement began in Judaism in the US and has been adapted by the Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme. It does not aim to convert but to have a spirit of dialogue, helping different faiths understand where they disagree about truth claims in a safe place. The movement started with Jews, Christians and Muslims. **The sessions are fully focussed on one text from each tradition being in a common language not a general discussion of the religion.** The text is looked as in context and in itself but also how it influences believers today. The aims are wisdom, collegiality (everyone is equal) and hospitality (non-judgemental attitude). **Exclusivists and literalists may have an issue with this of relativism.**

Christianity existed in a multi-faith society from its beginning. Living in a multi-faith society presents opportunities for co-operation, thinking, reflection and mission. It also presents challenges to their beliefs. In the 2011 census, 59.3% said they were Christian. **Leading Muslim scholars sent "A Common Word Between Us" in 2007 to Christian Churches.**

